

## How Others Do It: Using the Experience of Senior Professionals

### *Spotlight for Career Services Professionals*

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Since 1998, the career center at Illinois State University has tapped into the experience and expertise of the area's senior population to help provide services to students.

The Senior Professionals organization was formed to provide partnerships and interactions between retired and semi-retired people, and the Illinois State University students, faculty, and community.

Members of Senior Professionals serve as a valuable resource for academic functions of the university, explains Stephen Cantine, director of Illinois State University's career center.

"In addition," he says, "they strengthen the relationship of Illinois State University within the community. The Senior Professionals organization offers creative learning experiences, cultural enrichment, and social interaction."

These professionals held varied positions—ranging from teachers to judges—and they share an insider's knowledge of career areas, and provide insights and connections that assist students who are embarking on their careers.

"Senior Professionals provide a safe place for students to ask questions they may be too afraid to ask a recruiter or career adviser," Cantine says.

About 20 of the roughly 158 senior professionals participate in career center-sponsored events and programs, such as mock interviews, resume critiques, and the "first check" area during career fairs, where senior professionals provide advice, brief interviews, and a last-minute boost of confidence to students.

In addition, senior professionals assist the career center with pre-fair tours, which are designed to assist students who are nervous about attending the fair by giving them an up-close and detailed look at the event prior to its start.

The Illinois State University career center also offers a "senior professional in residence" program. Modeled after an "employer in residence" program, senior professionals spend a day in the career center meeting students on varying topics related to their backgrounds and discussing the students' specific career goals.

"Many senior professionals comment on how rewarding it is to pass on knowledge to a student about an industry or provide support during and after a mock interview," Cantine says. "When I see the students and the senior professionals interacting, I can see the genuine appreciation that each has for the other."

The career center appreciates the assistance of the senior professionals, who volunteer their services and even pay dues that help raise money for different projects on campus and in the community.

"I think for some senior professionals, it's a way to stay connected to a career and to share their knowledge, expertise, and experiences to a new generation of students who want to follow in their footsteps," Cantine says. "It's not all that different than the motivation that many of us had for getting into the field of career development."